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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY 25X1

INFORMATION REPORT

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SUBJECT Soviet Control of the Russian Church in Manchuria

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1. The Soviet Army took Manchuria in early August 1945. In September of that year the Moscow Patriarchate sent Bishop Elferi (now Metropolitan in Prague) to Harbin to gain the adherence of the Harbin Eparchy to Patriarch Alexei in Moscow, who had succeeded to the leadership of the Russian Church in the USSR after the death of Patriarch Tikhon in about 1944 or 1945. There were four bishops of the Russian Church in Harbin in September 1945. Metropolitan Mileti was ill and Bishop Nestor agreed to place the Harbin Eparchy under Moscow. Metropolitan Mileti died and Bishop Nestor was appointed as head of the Harbin Eparchy and raised to the rank of Metropolitan. Nestor sent Bishops Dmitri and Yuvinali from Harbin to the USSR. Dmitri, who had been ill, died soon thereafter.

2. The Soviet Consulate in 1945 offered Soviet citizenship to the Russian emigrés in Harbin and the great majority accepted. Of the approximately 90 priests in the Harbin Eparchy at that time, four priests, including myself, did not apply for Soviet citizenship. In regard to the laymen, about 1000 of all the Russians in Harbin did not take out Soviet citizenship. As of early 1953, there were about 20,000 Russians in Harbin. Of these, 17,000 were Soviet citizens and 2000 were not Russians, ie, they were of German, Latvian, Czech and other descent. The remaining 1000 were those who had not applied for Soviet citizenship.

3. Soviet pressure on the church in Harbin was directed against the higher churchmen, because the bishops could control the priests. In outlying areas, pressure was applied directly against the priests.

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Nestor [redacted] was arrested in 1948. He was succeeded by Bishop Nikander, who in his younger days had been an army chaplain. Nikander had become a monk after losing his wife and had been elevated to the rank of bishop. There was no pressure from Nikander, who had been a priest and understood the problems encountered in that position. Bishop Nikander is still [1954] head of the Harbin Eparchy. The Moscow Patriarchate did not transmit many orders to Harbin and did not interfere to any great extent. It appeared to be satisfied merely to have the Harbin Eparchy under its jurisdiction. Of course, the Russian church in Harbin regularly forwarded administrative reports to Moscow.

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4. The Soviet Consulate had succeeded in pressuring Nestor into ordering that no religious ceremonies, such as marriages, divorces, and, at times, christenings, could be performed until the civil equivalent had been carried out by the Soviet Consulate.
5. During the Korean War, at the time that propaganda about alleged US germ warfare was being disseminated, the Soviet Consulate ordered Nikander to send two priests to a public meeting and have them accuse the US. One priest, by speaking in generalities, managed to avoid such accusations, but the other priest followed the instructions.
6. Chinese Communist authorities interfered directly with Russian priests in outlying areas, such as Trekhrechye, near Hailar, where there were 10 churches. The indigenous Communists conducted a campaign against the prosperous Cossack peasants of the region, as well as the priests. The area was taken over by Mongols from Inner Mongolia, who reversed the policy, which had led to near starvation.
7. Another example of pressure from the Soviet Consulate on the Harbin Eparchy dealt with the case of a deacon in a Harbin church who persisted in extolling publicly the virtues of the late Czar. The Consulate protested to Nikander, who succeeded in dissuading the deacon from continuing his remarks.
8. There was also influence exerted upon Russian lay members of the church. However, this was directed at decreasing church attendance. Many Russians were employed by the Chinese Eastern Railway [later, the Chinese Changchun Railway] and it was indicated that they might be dismissed if they attended church. The railway also attempted not to give time off on Christmas. The Soviet Consulate in effect chose the heads of the Association of Soviet Citizens. These directors attempted to interfere with church attendance by such measures as scheduling dances to coincide with important church holidays. As a result of all these various pressures, very few young people between the ages of 15 and 25 attended church. Attendance in general dropped off during 1946 and 1947. However, large numbers went to church in subsequent years and [] still do. The increase in attendance resulted from the feeling of the Russians that they had nothing to lose by going to church, as most had been dismissed from the railway and as the Soviet Consulate did not protect the Russian emigrés, who had accepted Soviet citizenship from the Chinese Communists.

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